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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 002435

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EFIN](#) [KPAL](#) [EG](#) [IS](#) [MEPN](#)

SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ZAHAR TO CAIRO, NO
FOREIGN MINISTER MEETING

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) During an April 23 meeting with Senator Dodd (D-CT) and the Ambassador, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit reviewed GOE thinking on regional and bilateral topics (septel), and acknowledged reports that he did not meet with visiting Palestinian Foreign Minister Mahmoud al Zahar during the latter's April 22 transit of Egypt. Aboul Gheit urged the U.S. to focus on maintaining a viable peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, in order to keep "spoilers" (Iran) out of the Levant region. Egypt, he said, hoped to facilitate talks between the Israelis and Palestinians and would invite Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Abbas to Cairo soon ("maybe after a few months") for talks. Without a viable peace process, he said, Iran will seek to step in with money and ideology to "sustain" the Palestinians and spread its influence.

12. (C) Further describing GOE views on Hamas, Aboul Gheit told the Senator that Egypt was pressing Hamas to change its stance toward the peace process and the international community's specific conditions. Should such efforts fail, leading Abu Mazen to call for new elections, Aboul Gheit stated that Hamas would simply revert back to its violent, spoiler role, and we would be back where we started. The West must be patient, while continuing to aid the Palestinian people, as the process of bringing Hamas around would take several months, he said.

13. (C) According to media and Embassy contacts, Palestinian Foreign Minister Al Zahar spent the night of April 25 in Cairo, en route to Gaza from a regional tour of Persian Gulf states. Zahar reportedly met briefly with Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Soliman ("a courtesy call"), Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa, and with PLO figure Faruk Qaddumi ("Abu Lutf"). Despite widely reported public remarks by Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit suggesting he would meet with Zahar on his second visit to Cairo in his new capacity ("if he was in town"), no such meeting occurred, despite Aboul Gheit's having been in Cairo. Explaining Aboul Gheit's refusal to meet Zahar on an earlier stop in Cairo, Ezzedine Shukry, Aboul Gheit's peace process advisor, told poloff April 20 that the snub had been deliberate and intended to show Hamas leaders that relations with Cairo would not be "normal" absent movement toward peace with Israel.

14. (U) Senator Dodd's party did not have the opportunity to clear this message.

RICCIARDONE